



A Day in the Life of a Patrol Deputy

Contributed by MPO Dave Hoag

I have found that the only thing about my day on patrol that I can predict is that it's going to be unpredictable. This is probably one of the things I enjoy the most about my job.

I am entrusted to work alone and handle a large variety of calls and to make good common sense decisions. My department relies on me to apply the department policies and procedures, adhere to our ethics codes and state laws, and not expose the department, citizens, or myself to liability.

I never know what the next radio call will bring. In a day's work it is common to assist a stranded motorist, provide directions to several citizens, investigate a traffic accident, issue a ticket to a violator, or direct traffic. I may assist a business owner with shoplifting issues, help a neighborhood with a drug house, or try to solve a chronic parking violation problem. What I do in each case depends on the particular problem. I can get help from other members of the department, code enforcement, other agencies, and community members who act as our eyes to help solve a problem.

I am frequently investigating an incident or other low priority call when a call of higher priority is broadcast over the radio and I will "re-route" to handle that call. I will go back to the prior call when I am available. I investigate assaults, thefts, vandalisms, robberies, burglaries, frauds and pretty much any other type of crime that exists (other than federal offenses). I preserve, collect, and package critical evidence, and may photograph the scene and lift latent fingerprints. Sometimes, I call in our professional photographers and fingerprint staff to do that work. I determine from my training what certain illegal substances are, and field test suspected narcotics if necessary. I also deal with a variety of problems that aren't criminal such as evictions, neighbor disputes, natural death investigations, and even disobedient children. I frequently speak to classes at local elementary schools, and I make a point of speaking to children and their parents about safety concerns.

I spend a great deal of time in training. I go to a local racetrack every two years and spend a full day working on my high speed braking and driving skills. I train and am tested in my firearm skills several times a year. I am able to deploy a Taser gun when my regular firearm would be too much force. I assist detectives on an assortment of investigations, and assist other agencies from around the country with requests to locate persons or property or make arrests. I go to court and testify in cases as often as twice a week or as infrequently as once every two months.

I can spend my entire shift answering any of the above-mentioned calls or spend my day making traffic stops or hunting down persons with arrest warrants. I frequently drive code (lights and siren) to a call only to be told by other deputies who are at the scene that things are OK and I'm not needed. I can respond to a call that may seem routine and end up in an all out fight for my life while my backup is responding to help me. I have no choice but to be in top mental and physical condition if I want to ensure I go home to my family. The people I am sworn to protect expect that when I arrive at their house I can identify their problem and solve it, even though it may have taken months or years for the problem to become a crisis. I am expected to finish my calls even if it takes me into overtime at the end of my shift. I may not receive a thank you very often, but I have the personal satisfaction that I have touched someone's life, usually at a low point, and helped him or her.